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### From hate to political solidarity

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## From Hate to Political Solidarity: The Art of Responsibility

### Abstract

Hate is currently enjoying the status of *summum malum* within the common sense of constitutional democracies. Hateful acts are criminalised and hate speech tests the limits of our commitment to free expression. This paper shifts focus away from hate speech and crime and towards the structural conditions that normalise various verbal and physical forms of violence. Building on insights from feminist and race critical theory and the sociology of power it points the reader's attention to three important dimensions of structural violence only partially captured by the legal definitions hate speech and crime: the linguistic, the emotional and the embodied. It then sketches a proposal about the forms of political solidarity we should stimulate as prophylaxis against hate and argues that certain artworks can reveal and confront the naturalised social, political and cultural hierarchies that underprop – and sometimes erupt in – hate speech and acts. A case study serves as illustration.

### Key words

hate speech, hate crime, oppression, feminism, solidarity, artworks

### Introduction

Hate is currently enjoying the status of *summum malum* within the common sense of constitutional democracies. Hateful acts are criminalised and hate speech tests the limits of our commitment to free expression. Legislation and the state's coercive force are employed to make sure that toleration – and not hate – wins the day.

In the last few decades, many scholars have criticised the overwhelming academic and political preoccupation with hate as speech and crime. They have argued that conceptualising hatred narrowly, i.e. as the individual emotion behind speech and crimes, is reductionist, and that politically focusing on hate crime and speech while ignoring their structural roots is myopic. Two types of critique emerged. On the one hand, some have proposed an expanded notion of emotions as stretching beyond the individual psyche and body, either as identity-building forces that include relations between individuals and communities<sup>1</sup> or as composite assemblages that materialise in

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Ahmed, "The Organisation of Hate," *Law and Critique* 12 (2001): 345–365.

texts, laws, buildings, weapons, fences, border controls, and so on.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a second camp has argued that, rather than seeing hatred as the abnormal, pathological reaction of a single individual, we have to contextualise hate speech and crime within pervasive cultures of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, xeno-, homo- and transphobia that mar liberal democracies.<sup>3</sup> Often imperceptible patterns of injustice – ingrained in the liberal state’s institutions, the market and the public culture – inform the systematic infliction of various forms of violence against second-class human beings. Hate speech and crime are just two such forms among many.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper I start in agreement with this second camp and take up their invitation to shift our focus away from hate speech and crime and towards the structural conditions that normalise various verbal and physical forms of violence against certain groups, affecting their status as members of the moral community. I try to supplement their account in two ways. First, I complexify the conceptualisation of oppression with insights from social and political theory, and in particular from feminist and race critical thought and the sociology of power. Building on these literatures, I point the reader’s attention to three important dimensions of oppression that are only partially captured by the concern with hate speech and crime: the linguistic, the emotional and the embodied. Based on this revised account of oppression, I then move on to sketch a proposal about the forms of political solidarity that could be stimulated as part of a prophylactic project against hate. Taking the medical metaphor further, I argue that we need to shift our attention from the treatment of symptoms to the prevention of the chronic disease: what we are looking for is *not* a medicine for hate speech and crime, but a vaccination of the body politic against stereotypical negative visions of the different other, and unreflective indifference regarding the historical reproduction of patterns of injustice and violence. If criminal law – the state’s weapon of choice against hate speech and crime – is a blunt instrument when it comes to promoting inclusive solidarity, if the liberal state itself practically functions with differentiated categories of human worth and individuals internalise and embody arbitrary social norms, how can democracies challenge the naturalised structures of oppression underlying hate speech and hate crimes? How can they make the historical and cultural roots of hate visible? And how can they provoke reflection, emotional responsiveness and sensuous knowing in the larger public? In other words, how can democracies defuse hate speech and crime and cultivate habits of solidarity?

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<sup>2</sup> Birgitte Schepelern Johansen, “Locating Hatred: On the Externalization of Emotions,” unpublished manuscript on file from author. HAS THIS BEEN PUBLISHED?

<sup>3</sup> David Theo Goldberg, “Afterword: Hate or power?” in *Hate Speech*, ed. Rita Kirk Whillock and David Slayden, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage1995), 267–276; Barbara Perry, “A Crime by Any Other Name: The Semantics of ‘Hate’,” *Journal of Hate Studies* 4 (2005/2006): 121–137.

<sup>4</sup> Violence is one of five markers of structural oppression for Iris Young. See Iris Marion Marion, “Five faces of oppression,” in *Multiculturalism from the Margins*, ed. Dean Harris (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1995), 65–86.

The second contribution this chapter seeks to make is to argue that, unlike criminal law, certain works of art are particularly suited to reveal, problematise and confront the naturalised social, political and cultural hierarchies that underprop – and sometimes erupt in – hate speech and acts. This is not to diminish the institutions’ and social movements’ role in redressing historical and structural oppression, but to point to artworks’ potentially complementary and sophisticated contribution to a solidary democracy. The public education system, as well as awareness raising campaigns initiated by civil society actors, are a liberal’s obvious suggestions for cultivating a modicum of solidarity. Fundamentally, transformative political processes aiming to redress systemic injustices – political, economic, cultural – need to be initiated to ensure the institutionalisation of a democratic system worthy of its name. However, this paper takes a step back and focuses on a different instrument. It proposes that certain artistic products are particularly well suited for focusing citizens’ attention on previously unnoticed aspects of social reality and, due to their mediatedness, for providing a safe and propitious space for uncomfortable processes of reflection to unfold. In addition, artworks do not engage spectators only intellectually. They can also stimulate them sensorially and emotionally in a way that discloses individuals’ complicity in the reproduction of oppressive politics. Building on insights from aesthetics, I propose that an artwork’s addressing a multitude of individual faculties – imagination, memory, understanding, emotion, as well as the body – makes it a particularly fruitful means for highlighting the historically continuous connection between structural oppression and hate. Moreover, under certain circumstances, artistic products can enable the cultivation of forms of solidarity between citizens. While toleration has been hailed as the antidote to hate within liberal democratic societies, I propose that a certain notion of solidarity constitutes a more suitable political virtue. The solidarity we are looking for acknowledges the historical endurance of oppression, is understood as an open-ended, ever inclusive process rather than a final achievement, and resists thick notions of identity.

The first section will reconstruct arguments by scholars who invite us to leave behind the myopic focus on hate speech and crime as individualized, isolated, and emotionally charged occurrences and instead look into the structural conditions – reproduced across generations – that inform systemic patterns of violence. I challenge the notions of language, emotion and embodiment presupposed by hate speech and crime laws. I draw attention to language as a repository of unjust categories, to emotion as the anchor of undemocratic habits and to the body, both as a site of oppression and as complicitous with oppression. Building on a variety of contributions in critical theory, the second part turns to theorizing the kind of responses needed to neutralize the structural sources of hate in language, emotion and the body and build solidarity. I then attempt to delineate

an account of how certain artworks can have a transformational effect on the ways in which we relate as citizens. Last but not least, a case study will give concreteness to the theoretical positions advanced here. *Exhibit B*, the controversial show by Brett Bailey (2014), provides an exemplary test case for how artworks can, under certain circumstances, reveal the limits of a focus on hate and successfully – if uncomfortably – illuminate the pervasiveness and historical continuity of oppression.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, *Exhibit B* is an excellent illustration of how disorienting and disruptive aesthetic experiences can – not uncontroversially – attempt to cultivate habits of political responsibility and solidarity.

### **Beyond Hate as Speech and Crime**

In the last few decades, numerous scholars have challenged lawyers', legal theorists' and social scientists' myopic focus on hate speech and crime as the *summum malum* of our age. Disenchanted with the psychologising and individualising account of hate privileged by perspectives from criminal law, they have sought to thematise the underlying social dynamics that sometimes manifest themselves in hateful speech or crime, but which are not exhausted by them. For such accounts, reducing the problem to hate is misleading in that we obscure culturally complex patterns of oppression that inform hate speech and crime, but also a myriad of other exclusionary practices, norms and institutions. The experience of verbal or physical violence by individuals belonging to certain groups is not merely the result of a pathological affective reaction of a deviant.<sup>6</sup> Hate speech and crime are two of the many expressions of power asymmetries and violence that target racialised, sexual, ethnic or religious groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Reinterpreted against the background of a societal common sense that arbitrarily ascribes differential value to various classes of individuals, instances of hate speech and crime no longer appear as the result of irrational or deviant feeling but rather, as the highly visible upshot of differential categories of social identity. Therefore, focusing exclusively on evident abuses in word and deed is a non-starter for those who hope for broader processes of social change and a future of political solidarity.<sup>7</sup>

In what follows, I problematize three important elements that enter into the legal discourse on hate speech and crime and propose alternative visions thereof, visions that take into account the

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<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to the show, see BBC, “*Exhibit B*: Edinburgh's controversial art show,” accessed October 18, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/12ynxPVNKF1pYVrzZB9R2sM/exhibit-b-edinburghs-controversial-art-show>.

<sup>6</sup> “A Crime by Any Other Name,” n. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser and Cornel West are just some of the most prominent voices in the ongoing debates over structural injustice in political theory. For some emblematic contributions by these authors, see Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Injustice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) and Nancy Fraser, *The Fortunes of Feminism* (London: Verso, 2013).

systemic nature of oppression. *Language, emotion* and the *body* will be discussed in turn to show their role in sustaining tiered notions of human value within democratic societies, beyond easily identifiable instances of hate speech and crime.

### *Language*

Typical of hate speech regulations within constitutional democracies, the UK Public Order Act of 1986 stipulates that

A person who uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displays any written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting, is guilty of an offence if—

- (a) he intends thereby to stir up racial hatred, or
- (b) having regard to all the circumstances racial hatred is likely to be stirred up thereby.<sup>8</sup>

The law uses a notion of “speech” as speech acts or modes of behaviour that are either intended to stir racial hatred or that are likely to do so even if not intended as such. The offence is individualised, has a clearly identifiable perpetrator and a clearly identifiable victim who is a target because of certain dimensions of her identity: skin colour, race, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origin, religion, or sexual orientation.

Such an account of the power of speech to harm individuals misses the fact that language itself reproduces the hierarchical visions of humanity underpinning hate speech in *insinuations and suggestions, in reasoning and representations, in short, in the microexpressions of daily life*.<sup>9</sup> First, racial, gendered, sexualised categories of distinction are inscribed in, and reproduced through, language. Language is suffused with oppression since it is simultaneously a reflection of our unjust world and a force in its reproduction.<sup>10</sup> Objectifying, essentialising language causes harm by contributing to the maintenance of stereotypical, monolithic and fixed visions of certain groups’ identities.<sup>11</sup> Linguistic constructions of groups as exotic, criminal, immoral, terrorist, fundamentalist, hypersexual, promiscuous, lazy, etc. contribute to the oppression of women, the poor and various minorities in more pervasive and less visible ways than hate speech.

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<sup>8</sup> Government of the United Kingdom, Public Order Act 1986, accessed February 11, 2015 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64/contents>.

<sup>9</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.

<sup>10</sup> For an emblematic text see Mark Lawrence McPhail, *The Rhetoric of Racism Revisited* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002).

<sup>11</sup> For two important takes on objectification see Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009) and Martha Nussbaum, “Objectification”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24 (1995): 249–291.

Second, individuals enjoy differential authority in the use of language. One's use of language (slang, grammar, the scope of one's vocabulary, accent) plausibly constitutes one of the most important media of distinction.<sup>12</sup> The language that wins the struggle for dominance within a political community becomes the official, "natural language", a process that diminishes the authority of all those who do not speak it correctly. Differences in speech reflect the social position of the speaker (gender, class, education, or ethnicity) and are symptomatic of the overall uneven distribution of various forms of capital: economic, political, or cultural. Those who possess sufficient linguistic capital in the official language dominate the political institutions, while those who speak what is derogatorily called "popular," accented or non-literary language strive anxiously "to fit" by mimicking the more competent speakers. More often than not, they exclude themselves from public debates.<sup>13</sup> If they enter deliberations, interventions by the marginalised do not carry the same weight as interventions by articulate, politically versed individuals enjoying high levels of cultural capital. Moreover, some modes of participation by women, by the poor, by non-whites, run the risk of being disqualified for not conforming to the standards of rational, dispassionate argumentation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, publicly recognised linguistic competences and authority are unevenly distributed among the members of the political community, disempowering and excluding some from deliberation and political decision-making, while over-valuing others' contributions.

Some scholars of hate, such as Barbara Perry, have argued that language can be a source of empowerment. She has proposed that naming violence in more specific ways (violence *against women*; *racist* violence, etc.) will bring oppressive patterns into the light. Notwithstanding language's power to provoke semantic shocks and expose injustices through renaming and innovative use of concepts,<sup>15</sup> the theorist of political change should be weary of placing too much trust in its emancipatory potentialities, given the ways in which non-hateful uses of language reproduce patterns of social oppression and given the asymmetries of authority in the use of language. More importantly for this paper, focusing on the hyper-visible harm of hate speech to

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<sup>12</sup> Pierre Bourdieu is very critical of internalist approaches to language – such as those proposed by Saussure, Chomsky or Habermas – because they neglect the socio-historical processes behind dominant languages and are oblivious to the different levels of authority associated with different modalities of speaking. In other words, formalist accounts of language universalise the capacity to use language without universalising the conditions in which language is used effectively. Pierre Bourdieu *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), esp. 90–102.

<sup>13</sup> *Language and Symbolic Power*, n. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Feminist critics of deliberative theories of democracy have highlighted the problem of differential authority. For emblematic contributions see Lynn Sanders, "Against Deliberation," *Political Theory*, 25 (1997): 347–376 and Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Lara discusses 'semantic shocks' as innovative uses of language that move our moral powers by using words in radically novel ways. Examples are "the banality of evil" and "totalitarianism", and "der Muselmann". Maria Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

the detriment of a more comprehensive perspective of language's role in reproducing oppressive politics is politically myopic – and problematically conservative because of its myopia.

### *Emotions*

The hatred that makes the object of hate speech and hate crime laws is conceptualised as a virulent, intense, individualised and easily observable emotion that can lead to violence against members of a certain group by virtue of a certain characteristic, arbitrarily endowed with special meaning by the agent that instigates hate. The emotion of hate in hate speech and crime is understood as psychologically aberrant, pathological, exceptional and irrational, while the harm caused by being the target of hate speech is emotional and physical distress.

The focus on hate obscures the less visible and more pervasive ways in which the emotional anchorage of exclusionary ideas of social hierarchies contributes to their stability. Sara Ahmed argues that we should not think of hatred in a psychologising, individualising manner – but as relational, shared and essential to a community's exclusionary practices of self-definition.<sup>16</sup> It is debatable whether we need to forgo accounts of hatred as located in the subject in order to understand how they contribute to the reproduction of systemic abuses and exclusions. Individuals are socialised to feel in certain ways towards certain groups and, while there is a sense in which politically relevant emotions fuel collective actions and identities, it is not immediately obvious that a rethinking of their ontological status is in order. After all, individuals can dissent emotionally in relation to their group's identity. What we need to do is examine the emotional dimension of oppression in order to understand how it can prevent the forming of solidarity ties.

Emotions heighten the salience of arbitrary differences and motivate problematic behaviours against subordinate others along racialised, gender, ethnic, religious, sexual dimensions. Essentialising and objectifying ideas fuel not just hate, but also fear, contempt, and disgust towards the different others, thus contributing to their relegation to sub-human status. The contemptible can be dismissed as irrelevant in the public sphere. The disgusting can be shunned and be made to feel unwelcome more subtly than through public expressions of hate. Fear precludes meaningful engagements with the feared and leads to the separation of the social world into isolated islands of complacent comfort. Experiencing emotional discomfort in the presence of women, immigrants, sexual minorities, Blacks, ex-convicts or the poor, disables one's capacity to place oneself in their shoes and feel solidary with them.

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<sup>16</sup> "The Organisation of Hate," n. 1.



Within subordinate groups themselves, internalised oppression leads to self-exclusion: stigmatisation and stereotyping, lack of training in the practices of politics and lack of opportunities to exercise political agency meaningfully are correlated with a lack of trust in one's capacity to do so, translated in the belief that "politics is not for the likes of us!"<sup>17</sup> Feeling emotionally uncomfortable – intimidated, afraid, ashamed – debating with the more educated, the more articulate, more authoritative others might – at least partly – explain why some citizens withdraw from political decision-making. Moreover, racialised and classed hyper-visibility often makes the non-whites and the poor prefer to become politically invisible.

This brief discussion shows how emotions such as contempt, disgust, fear, or shame play an important role in practices of political exclusion and self-exclusion. The pernicious effect of arbitrary categorizations of individuals and their anchoring in the emotional register of both dominant and subordinate individuals escape the radar of the hate speech and hate crime perspective. While hate makes a proper object of attention for any democratic society, our vision needs to be expanded to cover less apparent – yet no less problematic – emotions and their impact on the prospects of political solidarity and democratic decision-making processes.

### *Bodies*

From within the legal perspective on hate speech and crime, bodily characteristics become salient as markers of inferiority in the eyes of the agent of hate. The colour of one's skin, one's physiognomy, gender or sexual orientation are selected as elements of difference and invested with negative moral or political relevance. In cases of hate crime, the body is the target of violence, sometimes to the point of annihilation.

From within the broader perspective of oppression advocated here, the body is politically relevant in more complex and subtler ways than the discourse on hate speech and crime would lead us to believe. First and foremost, social categories of distinction are embodied. Our body, as much as our words, disclose who we are: not just our skin colour, gender and physiognomy, but also our clothing, grooming, manners, gestures, bearing, posture, accent are politically relevant. One's position in the social world is inscribed in the body, often beyond the grasp of consciousness, explicitness, or deliberate transformation. We "code" and "classify" our fellow citizens – as respectable, authoritative, wise, trustworthy or dangerous, stupid, irrelevant, disgusting, contemptible, hate-worthy, etc. – according to the features of their embodiment. And such coding determines our relationships. Agents whose embodiment is categorised as inferior by the common

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<sup>17</sup> *Language and Symbolic Power*, n. 12.

sense of a society – non-whites, women, sexual minorities, persons with disabilities – are often marked for verbal or physical violence in ways that are not reducible to hate speech or hate crime. It is not exclusively in instances of hateful attacks that one painfully realises the political importance of the body and how one's own wellbeing is intrinsically related to how the others make us feel in our skin: afraid, ashamed, embarrassed or at ease.<sup>18</sup> Discomfort in one's skin is reproduced by a variety of unjust attitudes and practices that are likely to target certain bodies more than others, limiting their access to public space. The body we inhabit impacts our authority, respectability, access, opportunities and relative political power in the social world.

Secondly, our embodiment is the result of socialisation into oppressive social categories. Feminist and critical race theory have provided insightful analyses of embodiment and the way in which it manifests reified social roles within a society.<sup>19</sup> Individuals internalise rules of physical appropriateness, beauty, sexual attractiveness and health, working to sculpt their physique to conform to them. They learn to navigate safe spaces and avoid those where they are unwelcome. They adjust to the limits the social world prescribes for their physical existence. These processes are not politically insignificant for they preclude meaningful interactions beyond artificial differences, with negative consequences for those who feel that their embodied existence is devalued.

The lived experience of embodiment is thus highly complex and an eminently political matter. Feeling at home in one's body is essential for a sense of self-respect and for developing trust in one's power to act effectively in the political world.<sup>20</sup> Yet "feeling right" in our own skin is not merely a matter of individual self-reinvention and self-acceptance. Nor is it a matter of being protected from hate speech and hate crime. It requires intersubjective recognition and political inclusion, which presuppose the dislocation of essentialist and objectifying images of the embodied other.

This – admittedly cursory – exploration of the oppression as located beyond institutions in the individuals' language, emotions and bodies, underpins a bleak vision of politics, one of tiered

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<sup>18</sup> See also Alexis Shotwell, "A Knowing that Resided in My Bones: Sensuous Embodiment and Trans Social Movement," in Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell and Susan Sherwin (eds.) *Embodiment and Agency* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 58–75.

<sup>19</sup> For classic texts see Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986); Iris Young, *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Sandra Lee Bartky, "Suffering to Be Beautiful," in *"Sympathy and Solidarity" and Other Essays*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 13–29; Sara Heinamaa and Lanei Rodemeyer (eds.), *Feminist Phenomenologies: Special Issue of Continental Philosophy Review*, 43 (2010): 1–140; George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2008).

<sup>20</sup> For an emblematic take on sensuous wellbeing as a source of power see Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: The Crossing Press, 2007), 53–59.

humanity. Given the complexity and historicity of the messy reality underlying and fuelling hate speech and acts, political change cannot be brought about only by laws that trigger discrete, easily identifiable instances of verbal or physical violence. This paper argues that artworks can productively challenge the less-than-obvious linguistic, emotional and embodied roots of hate. They can engage citizens intellectually, but also emotionally and physically, in a way that reveals and confronts them with their participation in the reproduction of exclusionary hierarchies of human beings. Hopefully, such processes of reckoning will constitute the basis of concerted political action. However, before delving into a discussion of the transformational potential of artistic products, the next section uses insights from feminist theorising to provide an account of the practices of political solidarity that should replace essentialist, objectifying and oppressive relationships.

### **Solidarity: Intellectual, Emotional, Sensuous**

This section proposes that feminist reflection on the issue of women's solidarity constitutes an important, yet unexplored, resource for theorising the practices we need to cultivate in order to tackle the *linguistic*, *emotional* and *embodied* faces of oppression and the hateful acts that they might underpin. The question of how to build alliances between women who share neither an identity, nor a uniform experience of oppression, is one of the most hotly debated topics in feminist theory. The main contributors to this body of literature have problematized the nature of knowledge and relations that condition the emergence of ties of solidarity. It is in dialogue with this literature that I try to draw the contours of a political notion of solidarity. This paper argues that prophylactically cultivating political solidarity is a more appropriate and more productive strategy than the surgical targeting of hate speech and crime.

Elizabeth Spelman<sup>21</sup>, Sandra Lee Bartky<sup>22</sup> and María Lugones<sup>23</sup> converge in proposing a notion of solidarity that takes into account both intellectual-linguistic and emotional elements. They tackle the critique that black feminists raised against the myopic, yet universalising, vision of women and women's problems put forth by white feminists from within the narrow confines of their own experience and language. The lack of knowledge about the different other is the main reason why black women's systemic oppression is invisible to the privileged white. The solution is, first and foremost, about education and information. Spelman advises:

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (London: The Women's Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Sandra Lee Bartky "Sympathy and Solidarity" in *Sympathy and Solidarity* (Boston: Rowan and Littlefield, 2002), 69–89.

<sup>23</sup> María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling and Loving Perception," *Hypatia* 2 (1987): 3–19.

... read books, take classes, open your eyes and ears or whatever instruments of awareness you might be blessed with, go to conferences planned and produced by the people about whom you wish to learn and manage not to be intrusive...<sup>24</sup>

Learning about the other amounts to a practice of *apprenticeship*, supported by the faculty of imagination, which enables both intellectual and emotional connections. Imagination – the capacity to make present what is absent – enables us to *think*, but also to *feel our* way into the world of the disadvantaged, without thereby moulding them to fit the simplistic and stereotypical image we already have of them. Emotion accompanies us in entering the world of those marked for verbal and physical violence within democratic societies but, in imagining their experience, we must first, remain sceptical of the *language* in which they are represented:

...given the history of racism and other forms of oppression, be careful about what books you buy, what classes you take; think about the limits there presently are on what you are prepared *to see* or *hear*; examine your own motivations for wanting to understand others' lives.<sup>25</sup>

Watchfulness over the use of *language* is a crucial precondition for interrogating its role in reproducing patterns of oppression. Being aware of the limits of what (and whom) I can *see* and *hear* from within my position presupposes an awareness of the limits of my language and of the differential value I tend to ascribe to various forms of speech, some of which I may not even be in the habit of hearing.

Yet grappling intellectually, through *language*, with the other's history and experience is only one side of the coin: what we need to do is explore the *emotions* that can make her history salient for us. Solidarity presupposes *a knowing that has an affective taste*, a form of *fellow-feeling*.<sup>26</sup> In making the feelings of those marked for violence the object of my feelings, I begin to *playfully travel* in their world.<sup>27</sup> A traveller across artificial boundaries of social distinction must not be self-important; on the contrary, she must be open to self-creation and self-recreation through the encounter, avoiding getting stuck in one particular world or language that feels comfortable. Comfort leads to complacency and disables travelling and curiosity. On the contrary, ambiguity, complexity and double-edges constitute valuable sources – rather than obstacles. Openness to surprises, humility and respectful curiosity are three more features of playfulness, according to

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<sup>24</sup> *Inessential Woman*, n. 21, 178–179.

<sup>25</sup> *Inessential Woman*, n. 21, 179. My emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> "Sympathy and Solidarity," n. 22, 71.

<sup>27</sup> "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling and Loving Perception," n. 23.

Lugones. Last but not least, travelling comes with responsibilities: that of attempting to take hold of oneself and to examine the possibilities of change available in a certain world.

For travelling or apprenticeship to be successful in forging solidary relationships, the traveller/apprentice must fight her own imperialistic tendencies. Abstaining from the temptation to project one's own essentialising, objectifying image of the other is a precondition of learning about, and feeling with, the stereotyped other:

When simply imagining her, I can escape from the demands her reality puts on me and instead construct her in my mind in such a way that I can possess her, make her into someone or something who *never talks back*, who poses no difficulties for me, who conforms to my desires much more than the real person does.<sup>28</sup>

Maintaining the separateness of persons and ensuring one's language does not colonise her world are two conditions for cultivating non-oppressive ties of solidarity. The temptation to impose a pre-existing image onto the other – as opposed to entering their world open to being changed, intellectually and emotionally – must be counteracted with a self-relativizing attitude and a readiness for both intellectual and emotional self-objectification.

Spelman, Bartky and Lugones provide us with a wealth of ideas about how solidarity can be forged and how the roots of hate can be extirpated long before they bear their poisonous fruit. Intellectual and emotional travelling opens up the possibility for non-oppressive forms of solidarity. Maintaining a healthy dose of scepticism about one's *language*, relativizing it and allowing the other to *talk back* protects us against the unreflective reproduction of oppression through the use of arbitrary categories of distinction. Hearing and listening to those I have not heard or listened to before is crucial. Travelling *emotionally* presupposes leaving the comfort of my vision and aiming to understand why the other feels the way she does. However, our theoretical toolbox is not complete without a consideration of *sensuous, embodied* learning as part and parcel of democratic solidarity building.

*Sensuous* knowledge is the knowledge one gets through the experience of one's *body*, its pleasures and pains, through sensations we can sometimes name and others we have no language for. Our bodily experiences are regulated through various norms about normality, health, morality and access to space. These norms enable some individuals to feel at ease in their skin and entitled to open access to the public sphere, while others – for example women, non-whites, sexual minorities, persons with disabilities – are made to experience their body as constraint and as

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<sup>28</sup> *Inessential Woman*, n. 21, 181.

potential target of various forms of violence, hate speech and hate crime among them. Through their bodies, they are denied the important experience of safety and control over the world. As discussed in the previous section, individuals embody categories of distinction that often relegate some to the realm of the sub-human. In order to understand how social change could undercut the hateful manifestations of systemic oppression, we need to reckon with the fact that, feeling comfortable in one's body requires a change in the social world and in the practices of assigning certain bodies for subordination and violence.<sup>29</sup> Any account of solidarity needs to grapple with the difficulty of understanding what it means not to be at ease in one's skin. That is to say, our practices of apprenticeship, fellow-feeling and world-travelling must include an awareness of the sensorial dimension of experienced oppression, as well as its role in complexifying the loss of well-being by those whose bodies depart from arbitrary norms of acceptability or normality.

Stimulating *intellectual curiosity* and *emotional responsiveness*, but also *sensuous learning* are the cornerstones of responsible democratic citizenship in the age of deep pluralism and equally deep inequalities and injustices. It is only through a complex encounter with the other in language, emotion and the sensorium that openness to transforming oneself and our relationships is possible. This chapter argues that, in addition to dealing with hate as speech and crime, political theorists, as well as political decision-makers, should worry about how to nurture democratic languages, feelings and sensuous ways of knowing.

But how can political solidarity be stimulated? How can we simultaneously and effectively engage individuals' faculties in ways that steer them away from facile judgments and hatred and towards respectful solidarity? This chapter makes a modest proposal arguing that certain artworks can foster habits of solidarity. It can make visible and enhance the salience of historically reproduced oppression by simultaneously engaging the intellect, emotions and the body. More precisely, I propose that the "rich experience" theory of aesthetics provides us with the necessary tools for making sense of how certain artworks can nurture the kind of solidarity that any democracy needs for its healthy functioning.

### **The Art of Responsibility**

Prominent in debates over the so-called "paradox of painful art"<sup>30</sup>, the "rich experience" theory advances the claim that individuals seek aesthetic "experiences that are cognitively, sensorially

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<sup>29</sup> "A Knowing that Resided in My Bones: Sensuous Embodiment and Trans Social Movement," n. 18.

<sup>30</sup> These debates tackle the paradox of why individuals are motivated to consume painful art. For a quick introduction to these debates see Aaron Smuts, "The Paradox of Painful Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 41 (2007): 59–76 and Jerrold Levinson (ed.) *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

and affectively engaging: that is, rich experiences.”<sup>31</sup> The learning we get from experiencing richly through art is learning about the *salience* of certain facts about our world: we learn to care. In Smut’s terms, “[O]ne might know some fact or another, but not appreciate it. Coming to appreciate a descriptive fact is a process of understanding its implications and becoming ready to deploy it in future thought.”<sup>32</sup>

I propose that learning to care implies the awakening of intellectual, emotional and sensorial faculties. More precisely, certain artworks have the capacity to challenge spectators cognitively, morally, emotionally and sensuously. *Cognitively*, through association, juxtaposition, exaggeration and many other artistic strategies, spectators can be confronted with new ideas, and be invited to see often ignored aspects of human suffering. The limits of the public’s range of concepts, as well as the limits of a concept’s usage can be disclosed by poignant artworks. *Morally*, artworks can make apparent the restricted scope of one’s sense of justice and the complexity and ambiguity of ordinary moral judgments. Moreover, they can represent exemplars of moral virtue and suggest practical ways out of moral conundrums. *Emotionally*, artists provoke spectators by depicting unfamiliar emotions or by associating emotions with unexpected objects. Additionally, artworks can represent how it feels to experience the world from a certain position in the arbitrary hierarchy of human worth. *Sensuously*, pleasure and displeasure<sup>33</sup> work together to simultaneously seduce and reprimand the public into paying attention to obscured aspects of the human condition, including the other’s experience of feeling unwelcome in the public sphere.

Thus, powerful artistic experiences can challenge political, social and cultural boundaries by inviting us to intellectually reflect on our own selves, our use of language, our feelings, our embodiment, as well as on our relationships with the others, in ways we are not accustomed to. They provoke us to travel into the others’ world, thinking and feeling our way into their universe. In other words, they open the way for our becoming apprentices to our fellow human beings. And yet, because they are about anyone and everyone – and not specifically about us – and because they combine pleasure and displeasure in a complex and seductive mix, certain artworks can provide us with safe places for a transformative experience that involves revising our own concepts and ideas, being emotionally vulnerable, and experiencing physical distress.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup> Aaron Smuts, “Painful Art and the Limits of Well-Being,” in *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 123–152, at 132.

<sup>32</sup> “Painful Art and the Limits of Well-Being,” n. 31, 134.

<sup>33</sup> Iskra Fileva, “Playing with Fire: Art and the Seductive Power of Pain,” in *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 171–185, at 176.

<sup>34</sup> Aaron Smuts, “Art and Negative Affect,” *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 39–55.

political value of such experiences rests in their opening a space for what Lugones called *playful world travelling*: for learning about the other's story, her feelings and what it means to be in her skin, for reckoning with who we are in relation to her, and for starting the work of rebuilding our shared world on different, fairer foundations.

As our case-study shows, artworks can reveal to a wide audience the experience of not feeling at home in a social world and in one's own body, of being marked for subordination and excluded from humanity because of discriminatory categories of difference and their continuity across historical epochs. Most importantly for this paper, they can help the audience make the connection between such experiences and their own complicity in the reproduction of a social world marred by historical oppression, a world punctuated by hate speech and crime.

This paper humbly proposes that *Exhibit B* constitutes an excellent illustration of how art can serve the prophylactic, solidary-building purpose outlined in the previous sections. The show presents several parallel performances recreating scenes of Black oppression, past and present. It was last staged at the 2014 Edinburgh Festival before being cancelled in London. Protesters claimed that its white South African director, Brett Bailey, objectified and dehumanized the Black actors. The Barbican closed it for security reasons, deploring the blow to artistic freedom. In what follows, I propose to read Exhibit B as offering a powerful, rich experience of world-travelling: a soul-wrenching, visceral reminder of the very things western publics would rather forget – their unsavory colonial past and its continuation into the present.

Instead of the plaster or stuffed figures of the original human exhibitions in the natural history museums of Europe, the visitor is confronted with the dignified, unbearable gaze of the actors, who follow the members of the public with piercing eyes. The cast is diverse. Sarah Baartman, better known as Black Venus and Angelo Soliman, the African intellectual stuffed for display in the Austrian Museum of Natural History, are probably the best well-known figures that meet the visitor and challenge her power to hold their gaze. A Herero woman is presented scraping the flesh off the boiled heads of fellow prisoners in a German concentration camp. The heads are thus prepared for “scientific” research meant to prove white racial superiority in the universities of Europe. Another woman is presented as a sex slave, chained to the bed of a Belgian officer, while her husband works for the colonial powers, sapping rubber trees.

These disturbing scenes were set in the sumptuous Playfair Library at the University of Edinburgh – an opulent 19<sup>th</sup> Century hall. The mini-stages were flanked by shelves heavy with old manuscripts and busts of famous white scholars, pointing to the perpetrators and beneficiaries of



colonialism and referencing sciences' complicity with colonial plunder and extermination. Songs of sorrow and lamentation related to the genocide of the Nama people in the 1920s at the hands of German colonisers – with lyrics in Nama, Otjiherero, Oshiwambo, Tswana and Xhosa – were sung by a quartet of singers who played the role of the severed heads in Doctor Fisher's curiosity cabinet. Any illusion that racial humiliation and violence was a thing of the past was discouraged by performances representing contemporary racial abuses, mostly related to deportation and incarceration:

Exhibit B is not primarily a work about colonial-era violence. Its main focus is current racist and xenophobic policies in the EU, and how these have evolved from the state-sanctioned racism of the late 19th century. These policies do not exist in historical isolation. They have been shaped over centuries. The dehumanising stereotypes of otherness instilled in the consciousness of our ancestors have been transmitted subconsciously and insidiously through the ages. Exhibit B demands that we interrogate these representations.<sup>35</sup>

Political-aesthetic judgments are complex, and the question of who is entitled to speak on behalf of whom needs careful and attentive consideration.<sup>36</sup> In what follows, I propose a tentative and charitable reading of this work as a condemnation of historical oppression and as an alternative history, told by its own victims. I write as a white Eastern European woman, working at an old university in an affluent western country, i.e. I write from a position of authority and privilege. Having seen the performance in Edinburgh and having carefully studied both sides of the debate surrounding *Exhibit B*, I argue that several aspects of the show can help dispel worries about the director's abuse of Black bodies.

First, local, amateur actors were employed to embody the characters. Stuffed, mummified, inert or silent bodies were replaced with live actors who, instead of being the passive target of objectifying gazes, turn a critical, confrontational gaze back towards the public. While the actors do not speak, the entire setup of the show institutes a reversal of the roles between actor and spectator. The spectator is confronted with the scrutinizing eyes of the actor: her movements are watched and closely observed as she advances through the gallery from one diorama to the next. The power of

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<sup>35</sup> Brett Bailey, "Yes, Exhibit B is challenging – but I never sought to alienate or offend," *The Guardian* September 24, 2014, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/24/exhibit-b-challenging-work-never-sought-alienate-offend-brett-bailey>.

<sup>36</sup>For a report on the protests against *Exhibit B* see BBC, "Art show Exhibit B called off after racism protests," September 24, 2015, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-29341361>. The controversy spilled over to France, where protests were organised against the show.

the spectator's gaze is completely undone and silence enables a visceral – and I would argue deep – confrontation with the visitor. Words can be superfluous when the body speaks that loud, i.e. when the sensorial encounter is so powerful. For the members of the audience, there is no consolation, respite or escape: only a provocation to remember the unsavory past and change the present into which they are shown to be complicit. Assimilating the actors to pre-existent images of Black passivity and lack of agency is made impossible by these artistic maneuvers. Second, the white colonists are not erased from the representation, as some protesters argued. White marble busts of white male “notables” flank the performances, staged in an opulent hall within Edinburgh's Old College. I suggest the show could be read as an insertion and affirmation of a forgotten, silenced side of history into spaces purged of any reference to Europe's shameful past. It makes present persons who had been excluded from places of knowledge production, persons whose exploitation and extermination financed the development of those very places. In other words, the show amounts to a denunciatory exercise in historic myth demolition. Thirdly, the show featured written testimonies by the actors about their reasons for participating in the project – the painful experience of racism being the most prominent – their personal hopes regarding the experience of being part of *Exhibit B* and the politico-didactic impact they anticipated the show to have on its audiences. By allowing the actors to “talk back” – literally through testimony, but also through lyrical songs, scrutinizing glances, and dignified presence – the director makes it impossible for the spectator to colonise the world in which she is travelling. Observed visually by the piercing eyes of the actors, moved aurally by the heart-wrenching lamentations of the choir, and addressed verbally through testimony, the visitor is the intended target of a message that does not allow for easy appropriation and abuse.

Therefore, I want to cautiously propose that the performances directed by Brett Bayley' ensemble should be read as an *intellectual*, *emotional* and *sensuous* invitation into a shameful and painful past for the purpose of examining its continuation into the present and our own complicity in its reproduction. Intellectually, the visitor is implicated in a past of oppression and violence, into a moral order that dehumanises some and places others at the helm. The show confronts us with the abhorrent realities of the colonial past and highlights its concealed prolongation in the present of colour-blindness. Colonial atrocities insert themselves in the British public space, a space dominated by stories of imperial greatness and featuring minimal reckoning with Britain's participation in the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>37</sup> The *tableaux vivants* representing the situation of non-

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<sup>37</sup> For a critical analysis of the apology offered by Tony Blair for British participation in the slave trade, see Michael Cunningham, “‘It Wasn't Us and We Didn't Benefit': The Discourse of Opposition to an Apology by Britain for Its Role in the Slave Trade,” *Political Quarterly* 79 (2008): 252–259. Also, Emma Waterton and Ross Wilson, “Talking the Talk: Policy, Popular and Media Responses to the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade using the

whites in today's Europe challenge the viewer to reflect on the ways in which racialised hierarchies and patterns of injustice are not merely a thing of the past that has been overcome, but a reality of systemically unjust contemporary democracies.

Linguistically, the titles of the performances problematise oppression. "Found objects" is the title of several scenes that provide the public with reasons to problematize the on-going objectification of non-whites in Europe and their exclusion from personhood through public policies and the carceral system. By juxtaposing the word "objects" with the pained or angry, unavoidable gaze of the actors-subjects, the director seeks to directly shock us linguistically, cause cognitive dissonance and emotional discomfort. Language is creatively used to rename people and histories in ways that dislocate hegemonic accounts of historical progress and liberal colourblindness. The story of the Belgian general's sex slave is entitled "A place in the sun" – in an attempt to contrast romantic western images of colonial lands with the brutal reality of human exploitation and annihilation. "Dutch Golden Age," presents a still life with overflowing bowls of fruit and the bust of an enslaved man forced to wear a perforated metal mask covering his face.<sup>38</sup> The discrepancy between the title – hinting at the self-understanding of former colonial powers – and the brutal exclusion of the colonised from humanity, speech and history could not be greater.

The stories told have emotional resonance. Walking through the show, spectators visibly experience sadness, embarrassment and anger at what human beings can inflict upon other human beings. Tears are shed. Emotions are stimulated through the mix of powerful performances that link the violence of the past to the violence of the present, the strict and alienating control of visitors' movements through the library, and the lamentations of the singers in the Exhibit Quartet. The actors face the public with tearfully sad, desperate, angry, resigned or scrutinising expressions, never losing eye contact. Reckoning with the sorry state of humanity, past and present, cannot be avoided. The spectator/traveller enters the world of the racialised other, is pushed to learn from their sorrow and humiliation, and grieve.

Sensuously, the show confronts the viewer on multiple levels. First, the spectators are closely monitored until they enter the main hall of the library. They are required to draw numbers, sit in a room full of empty chairs and wait in silence for their turn to enter. An actor aleatorily calls numbers, which means groups and couples are broken down into individuals. The spectator is

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'Abolition Discourse'," *Discourse & Society* 20 (2009): 381–399 and Mihaela Mihai, "When the State Says 'Sorry': State Apologies as Exemplary Political Judgments," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21(2013): 200–220.

<sup>38</sup> Bailey in John O'Mahony, "Edinburgh's most controversial show: Exhibit B, a human zoo," *The Guardian*, August 11, 2014, accessed February 2, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/aug/11/sp-exhibit-b-human-zoo-edinburgh-festivals-most-controversial>.

frustrated of any support by friends and family – a move meant to enable individual reflection through the direct encounter with the actors’ piercingly uncomfortable gaze. An intimate connection is created between the actor-turned-spectator and the spectator-turned-actor, a connection that precludes the denial of humanity and dignity. The physical distress of the visitors is apparent, many weep. The audience in Edinburgh became visibly uncomfortable in their own skin as the show switches roles: the spectators become unskilled, embarrassed actors, moving uneasily from one *tableau* to the next, under the vigilant eyes of the characters.<sup>39</sup>

Visitors are challenged to become aware of a shared political myopia regarding the continuation of past systemic violence into the present. The wailing of the quartet is the only non-visual stimulus and while the languages are not accessible to the audience, the sorrow in their songs is.

Discomfort is part and parcel of the rich experience *Exhibit B* provides. Intellectual, emotional and sensuous discomfort enables the travelling into the others’ past and present world of oppression. Complacency is discouraged through the insertion of contemporary scenes that highlight the limits of a focus on hate speech and crime, when vast categories of humanity are relegated to sub-human status through migration and criminal law. It is representations of institutionalised human hierarchies that preoccupy Bailey and his main interest is to reveal the shadows of the racial past into the present of continued oppression. I propose that the show invites the public to recognise and affirm the significance of these *tableaux* as part of a complex picture of continuous political, economic, cultural, linguistic and physical oppression, a picture that eludes us if our attention is captured by discrete acts of hate speech and crime against specific individuals.

*Exhibit B* does not allow out imagination to colonise the world of the different other. The separateness is maintained through the cognitive, emotional and physical confrontation with representations of realities that we have been blind to or would rather forget. The innovative use of language shocks and aims to kick-start processes of reflection. The nature of the atrocities represented, the pained gaze – its sadness and anger, i.e. its dignity – the sensorial experience combining musical pleasures with physical discomfort, as well as the testimonies of racist encounters by the actors impede easy appropriations. Leaving one’s world of linguistic, emotional and sensuous comfort and meeting the actors directly opens up the possibility for self and world-recreation. In engaging a multitude of faculties the performance is apt at enabling apprenticeship, fellow-feeling and playful world-travelling, thus contributing to the prefiguration of solidary relationships between persons.

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<sup>39</sup> Bailey specifically orchestrated the switch of roles: “The installation is not about the cultural or anatomical difference between the colonial subject and the spectator; it is about the relationship between the two. It is about looking and being looked at. Both performer and spectator are contained within the frame.” “Yes, Exhibit B is challenging – but I never sought to alienate or offend,” n. 35.

## Conclusions and Potential Criticisms

This chapter has argued that the focus on hate as the greatest evil plaguing democratic societies is misleading and reductionist. In agreement with those who propose a shift in our economy of attention from hate to its systemic underpinnings, it has attempted to offer an account of political solidarity that could sever individuals' intellectual, emotional and physical anchoring in an unjust social world. Artworks' transformational potential – their capacity to engage various intellectual and emotional faculties as well as the sensorium – has been put forth as a particularly incisive and sophisticated instrument for such a complex and difficult political task. Artistic experiences can alienate the spectator from her comfortably familiar world and confront her intellectually, emotionally and sensorially with an alien world of a different other, which she is invited to explore as a respectful traveller. Openness to hearing alternative stories and revising one's self-understanding, to feeling the salience of a previously ignored reality and embracing the sensorial discomfort of the other as epistemologically valuable – these are the preconditions of cultivating non-oppressive relationships. Before concluding, I will address three potential criticisms that could be raised against the views presented here.

First, one might plausibly argue that the account of solidarity advanced here is highly demanding. The account of receptivity theorised as part of *apprenticeship*, *fellow-feeling* or *playful world-travelling* is too trying for the citizens of democratic societies. In response, I would suggest that such solidarity-building practices should be welcome and understood as an opportunity for learning and building new relationships, rather than as a source of stress. This merely involves not shunning literature, theatre, film, or any artwork that might alienate us from our familiar and comfortable ideas about the world. Because of their mediatedness and hedonic power of seduction, they can provide a safe place for reflection, emotional and sensorial understanding to unfold securely, making us aware of the salience of structures of power underpinning hate speech and acts.

Not everyone will respond solidarily to the provocation of artistic products such as *Exhibit B*. It is possible, and indeed to be expected, that some world-travellers might resist entering uncomfortable, painful and challenging territories. Being complacent is easier than undergoing processes of self-transformation and repositioning in relation to the different others in the social world. It might also be the case that backlash will ensue – though the fact that the message

combines aesthetic pleasure with painful self-reflection might lessen the possibility of reactionary responses.

The second worry we need to address has to do with the accessibility of such art. Are shows like *Exhibit B* accessible to all citizens or are they targeting the intellectual and cultural elite who is already sensitive to issues of structural oppression? The question of accessibility is important as the forging of solidarity depends on the uptake by the audience. Before discussing accessibility, however, is important to state that we should not assume that the cultural elite is in a privileged position when it comes to being aware of the realities challenged by *Exhibit B*. Beyond this obvious fact, two points need to be made. First, that there is a thin line between delicately inspirational and too heavy-handed pedagogical art, which can misfire by stifling individuals' imagination, as well as their emotional and sensorial freedom. Aesthetics allows for no clear recipes of how rich artistic experiences can be achieved, but there are sufficient exemplars around to keep us optimistic about the plausibility of our political proposal. By providing sufficient information about the performances to facilitate the reckoning with the salience of the message, while allowing visitors to choose how to interact, when and for how long with the *tableaux*, Bailey created an ideal space for a rich aesthetic experience of intellectual, emotional and sensorial travelling into a different, unfamiliar world. Secondly, while the show discussed here was displayed at a festival usually attended by the cultural elite, it created sufficient controversy to make its way into the pages of most media outlets in the UK and Europe generally. Moreover, there are plenty of examples of other cultural products that have been more broadly disseminated and that escape the suspicion of being addressed only to a small elite. TV series such as *Holocaust* (1978), *The Wire* (2002–2008) or *Shoah* (1985) and films like *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (1960), *La haine* (1995) or *Caché* (2005) have given rise to important public debates about the complex nature of oppression and one's participation in its reproduction.

Last but not least, is all art potentially transformative in the way *Exhibit B* is? The answer is a clear *no*. There is plenty of art that confirms skewed visions of history and that reinforces arbitrary differences between groups, obscuring the systemic roots of hate. Notwithstanding pervasive myths of artistic independence and subversion, art is part of the social world and it is not immune to power constellations. As such, it can be complicit in the reproduction of hierarchical visions of humanity. Sufficient internal diversity in the artistic world will, however, ensure spectators' exposure to alternative narratives. Hopefully, artistic products that challenge engrained arbitrary habits of thought, emotion and embodiment will provide rich experiences that could potentially push democratic societies to more embracing, solidary relationships. The unpredictability of the

results is, however, something we have to learn to live with in a democratic society committed to pluralism.